

Merry Christmas

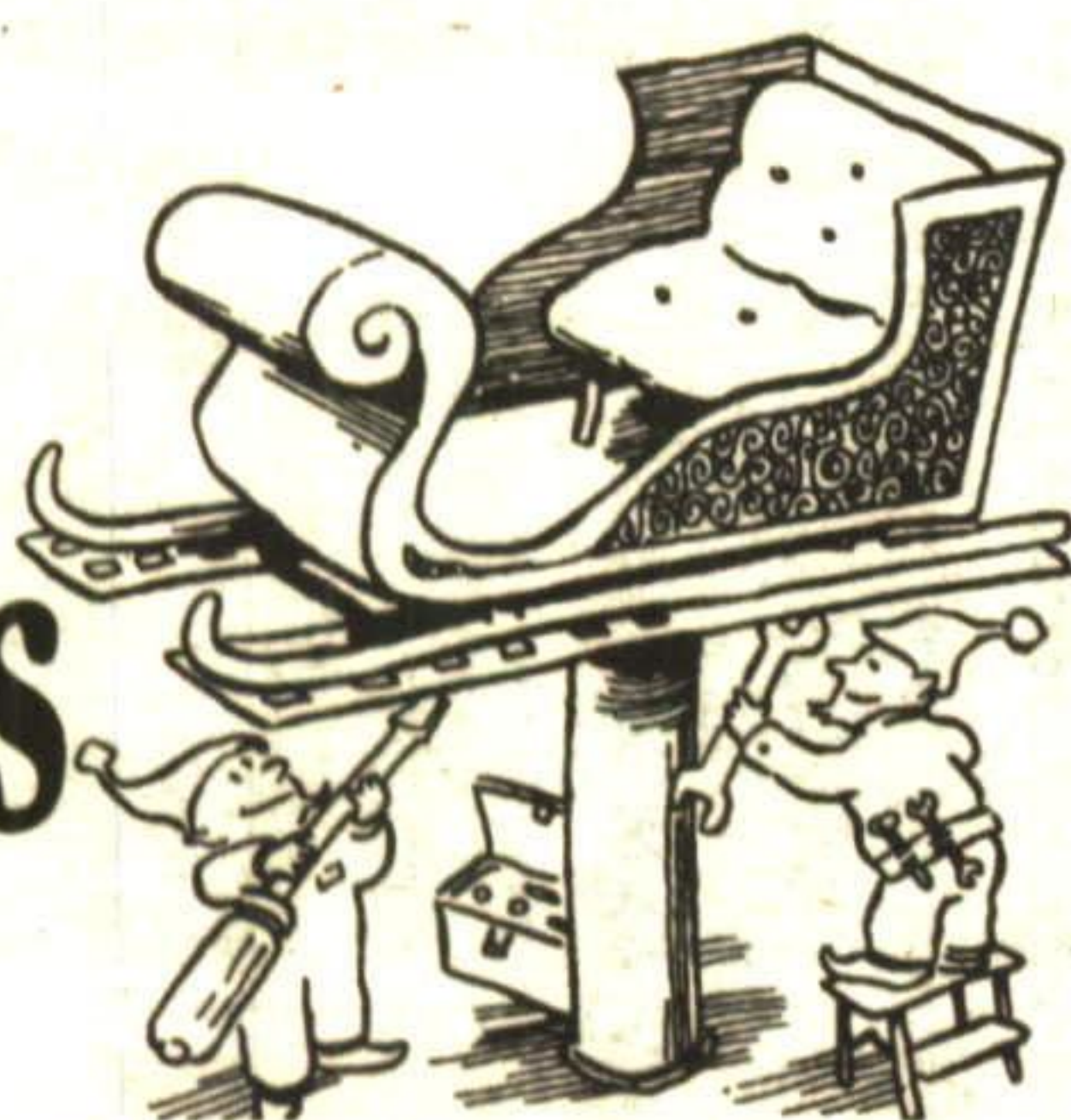
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Consider the out-of-the-ordinary gift

By KIM ARNOTT
Special

Stuff. We all have too much of it—at least it seems that way given the flurry of garage sales every spring.

Yet, the quest to buy ever-more stuff for friends and family is one of the biggest stresses of Christmas for most of us. Here are some ideas for making this Christmas easier on the environment, gentler on your pocketbook and better for your mental health.

Use your imagination

Before you rush out to the department store for another tie, sweater or bottle of perfume, spend a few minutes considering less usual gift ideas.

Framed or mounted photos make wonderful gift ideas for family and friends, while homemade baking might be a perfect present for the overworked mother on your list.

Tickets to a local concert, theatre production or sporting event offer an opportunity for an evening out—a treat many people can't afford to buy themselves.

Hand-drawn gift certificates offering help in the garden, babysitting time or a romantic dinner for two, will be gifts that are savored in months to come, rather than ones that end up in a garage sale.

Giving of your time, talent and love is sure to be appreciated and

will help cut back on that commercialization of Christmas we all love to bemoan.

Give in their name

Find a cause or charity that matters to your friends or family and make a donation in their name. A note stating that you've given \$30 to the local humane society, wrapped up with a brightly-colored dog toy or container of cat treats could be a fabulous gift for the pet-lover on your list.

A \$25 donation to the World Wildlife Fund (1-800-267-2632) will buy one kilometre of migratory bird flyway and preserve wild bird habitat. You'll receive a special

These are just a few of the thousands of charitable organizations that need donations. You might also consider a local hospital, social service agency or cultural organization.

Don't forget your ethics

Support companies that are good to the environment, make charitable donations, help out in your community and demonstrate international ethics. If you don't like child labor or cosmetic animal testing, make sure your spending habits send that message. And look for products that use renewable resources and are not over-packaged while you do your holiday shopping.

Give to Mother Earth too

Give a gift that's good for wildlife, plant-life or human-life.

Bird, bat and butterfly houses, as well as feeders are all the rage these days. Find

them at many local

bird and nature stores, or if you're handy, build one yourself. Most are quite simple and plans are available at the local library.

The gardener on your list would probably appreciate wildflower seeds, a set of brightly-colored gloves or simply an gift certificate for two hours worth of weeding.

Bicycles, fitness-club memberships, hand-weights or running shoes will make for healthier friends and family, all the better for celebrating future holidays with.

See GIFT, page 15



adoption certificate to wrap up for that hard-to-buy-for nature lover.

Or, for a friend who loves to hike, why not purchase a metre of the TransCanada trail. A \$36 tax-deductible donation will help build another metre of the cross-country walking trail and your friend's name will be imprinted in a trail pavilion in the province or territory of your choice. Call 1-800-465-3636.

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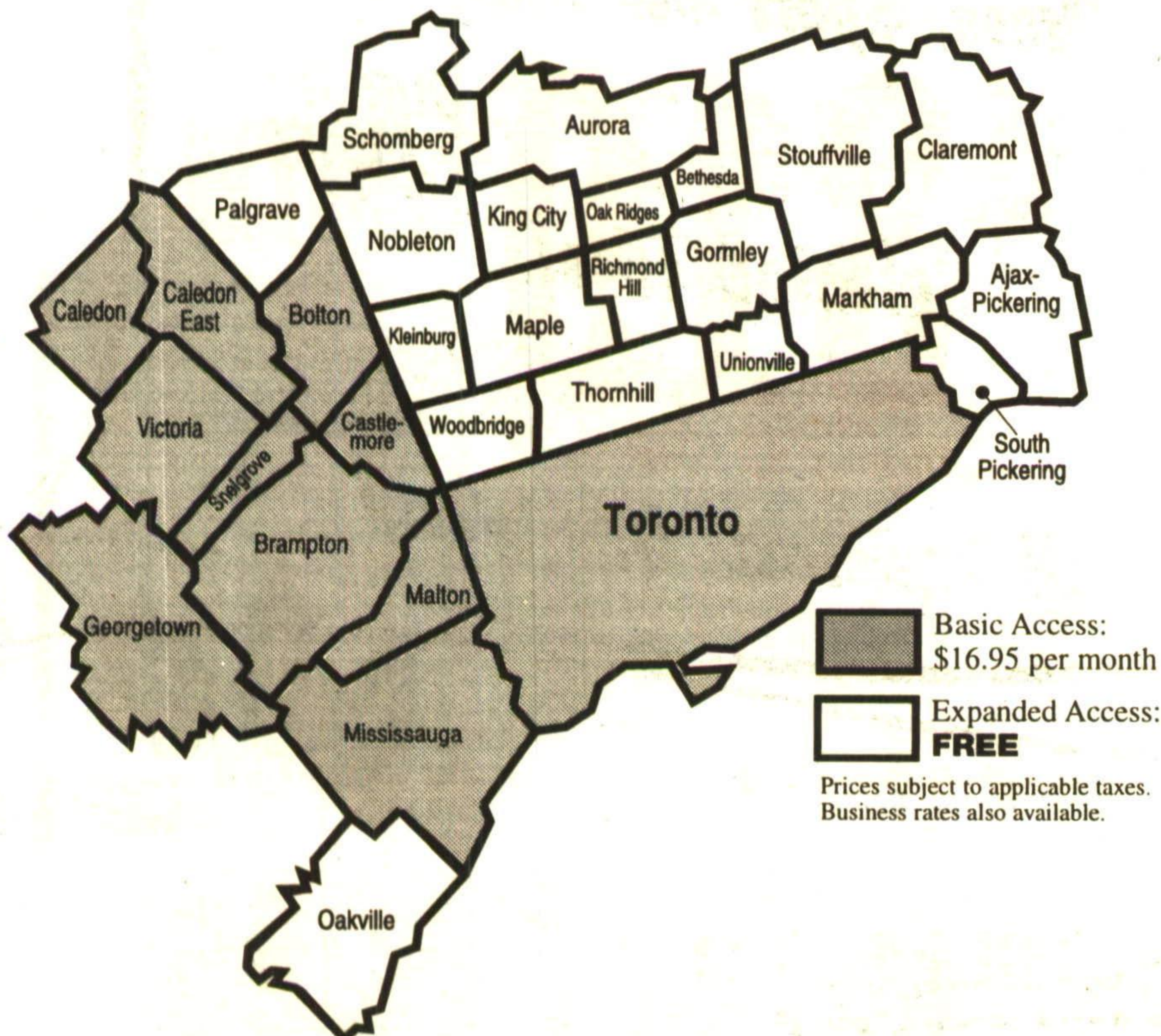
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